



*Boston Mayor Thomas Menino greets athletes from local Boston schools*

**Credits:**

City of Boston Photography Department

## Boston City TV one of nation's best metro television services

By Roger Lyons, Boston Television Examiner

When one thinks of a metropolitan television service, it may conjure up a low-budget, C-Span lookalike. The Boston City TV Channel indeed fits that description, but offers a whole lot more. As part of Boston's Office of Cable Communications, it provides the city of Boston, MA with one of the broadest, most comprehensive telecast and web services in the country.

Technically, Boston's Office of Cable Communications is a division of the Department of Information Technology (D.O.I.T.) and is the 'E & G' of 'PEG', the acronym that stands for public, education and government access. Some of the primary functions of the Cable Office include handling cable regulations, viewer calls and other related issues. It also programs Boston Kids and Family TV, providing day-long children's shows in partnership with WGBH and adult education programming in the evenings.

Boston City TV produces and programs the City's news and public affairs service on Comcast and RCN. The daily schedule from 8am to 4pm consists of the Boston Public School's educational access channel called BPS-TV in partnership with the CPB/Annenberg Foundation. They run cable-in-the-classroom programming, whereby students can learn at home using curricula posted online.

Most of what airs after 4pm is produced primarily by Boston City TV. Programming includes public events sponsored by the city, many directly involving Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, such as press conferences, speeches, ribbon-cuttings, groundbreakings and mayoral announcements. The telecasts are shown in their entirety with minimal editing and are accomplished with a tiny staff plus student help. 'We have lots of interns,' explains Station Manager David Burt, who is also the President of the Boston/New England Chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. 'We're kind of a training facility for interns.' The interns run a second camera at many events, and the b-roll they shoot is edited into the footage of these events to add to the production value.

'We're out all the time,' continues Burt. 'His (the Mayor's) schedule is crazy. We come back, edit it together. We put it on our channel and put it up on the website as programming for our on-demand video library.' Boston was one of the first cities in the country to post all programs they produce on their website and stream the channel live.

Studio programming includes 'About Health with Jeanne Blake', a monthly 1/2 hour show, hosted by the former 'Chronicle' host on WCVB. The program focuses on a hot health topic, featuring local physicians, public health officials, and local celebrities. Blake even did a program on skin cancer where she was the on-camera patient, including a shoot in the OR and an in-studio discussion with the doctor who performed the procedure on her. The program airs in 20 cities around the country.

Another program produced by Boston City TV is 'Read TV'. Mayor Menino wanted a TV show to help kids to read. 'His goal is to have kids read at age level by grade 3,' explains Burt. Enter 'Read TV', produced with help from Read Boston, an outreach group for neighborhood kids that gives away thousands of donated books each summer and provides the Storymobile to the community. 'Read TV's' format varies. Books are read to young people by program host Sarah Farbo, a special guest or a book's author. Shows are recorded from the studio or on location, where kids can be on the set. 'Read TV', which airs weekdays at 4pm, has been nominated for 2 Boston/New England Emmy Awards, as has the aforementioned 'About Health with Jeanne Blake'.

In addition, Boston City TV produces live and live-to-tape sports programming. Pat Flaherty produces the programs and does the play-by-play for 'The Mayor's Game of the Week'. The telecast covers local high school basketball and football games, including playoffs in the fall and winter. In the summer, they cover the BNBL, which is the Boston Neighborhood Basketball League. Boston City TV uses the equipment and crew from the Boston Neighborhood Network, with whom they share facilities. One of the football telecasts was recently nominated for a Boston/New England Emmy.

Most of the city has been wired with fiber optics by Comcast, and as soon as the process is complete, Boston City TV will be able to transmit video back and forth. 'We hope to get these games live on our channel and on the web, too,' says Burt.

Because of the Mayor's desire to show transparency in government, Boston City TV airs a number of live meetings, covering the Boston Redevelopment Authority and the Boston School Committee, and others in the future. Boston City Council meetings are regularly aired, but they are produced by a dedicated production unit at Boston City Hall.

Programs produced by Boston City TV positively impact viewers in the Boston neighborhoods. Burt tells a story of how a viewer approached him and a program host one day. 'We did a public health-related program on addiction,' Burt explains. 'I remember a woman coming up to us on the streets and saying, 'Oh, my God. I saw your program and it changed my life. It made me think about what I'm doing with my life and I got the help that I needed.'

Boston City TV also produces a number of public service announcements on a wide variety of topics for a diverse spectrum of audiences. 'Our job is to inform and educate residents,' states Burt. One example he cites is the public service campaign produced subsequent to the Haitian earthquake. Viewers were informed about whom to call to find out about family members and to obtain emergency information.

'The challenges in our future are technology and money,' Burt explains. 'Keeping up with technology is tough. We don't have a huge budget or the personnel either.' A 10-year veteran of commercial television prior to his arrival at Boston City TV 16 years ago, Burt has been asked by a number of people if he missed commercial TV. 'I said 'no', because I feel the TV production we do here actually means something to people,' Burt elaborates. 'It can educate them and inform them about what's going on in their city. This makes a difference in people's lives.'